

Arizona Fact Book on Violence Executive Summary 2002

Violent crime rates have declined steadily since the early 1990s when they reached 20-year highs on both the national and local levels. This decline is promising; however, violence remains an important problem in Arizona. As of 1999, the state of Arizona ranked sixteenth highest in the United States for violent crime rates with the seventh highest murder rate, fifteenth highest robbery rate, sixteenth highest aggravated assault rate and twenty-ninth highest forcible rape rate.

Debunking Myths About Violent Crime

While we often think violent crime consists of random acts of violence perpetrated by a stranger against an innocent victim, criminologists have debunked many of these myths.

- ▼ The age of the typical violent crime offender is between 12 and 24, with a peak in violence rates occurring around the age of 18.
- ▼ The age of the typical violent crime victim is between 12 and 24, with a peak in victimization rates occurring around the age of 18.
- ▼ Teenagers are more likely to be robbed than any other age group. Persons aged 16 to 19 were twice as likely to be robbed than those 25 to 34 and 10 times more likely to be robbed than those over 65.
- ▼ In 1999, 63 percent of homicide victims were under age 35; 12 percent were under age 18.
- ▼ Males are victimized at rates approximately 40 percent higher than those of females (with the exception of sexual assault).
- ▼ Between 1993 and 1998, Native Americans experienced violence at rates more than two times that of Blacks, 2.5 times that of Whites and 4.5 times that of Asians.
- ▼ Increases in annual income are associated with decreases in violent victimization. The income category with the highest rates of victimization is comprised of those who earn less than \$7,500 a year.

Influences on Violent Crime Rates

It is difficult to determine what factors have caused the changes in rates of violence seen in Arizona and its cities over the last 25 years. There is a substantial body of literature to draw upon, but the strength of the large majority of this research is limited due to weak research designs. The relationship between factors influencing violent crime and rates of violence is best described as probabilistic. Rather than causing rates of violence, these factors influence the probability that violent acts will occur.

It is likely that there are many different factors that influence overall rates of violent crime. Consequently, it may be beneficial to consider the joint influence of a number of factors rather than attributing change in rates of violence to a single specific cause. For example, it is likely that the decreases in violence that occurred during the mid- to late 1990s were due to the confluence of several factors including the robust economy, the changing age structure of the population, changes in drug markets, community collective efficacy, family structure and criminal justice system policy.

Despite this complicated picture, there is an emerging structure to accumulating evidence on the predictors of changes in rates of violence. With this emerging structure comes the promise of more effective violence prevention. Evidence continues to demonstrate that changes in the characteristics of the community, changes in the criminal justice system and individual changes all can have an impact on overall rates of violence. Efforts to change overall rates of violence should consider carefully each of these different aspects.

Prevention programs that result in meaningful change at the community, criminal justice system and individual levels are more likely to have a measurable impact on rates of violence than those that do not. While the causal structure of violence is indeed complicated, evidence regarding the causes of violence and the characteristics of effective violence prevention programs is accumulating. The potential of violence prevention efforts that translate this evidence into effective practice present an important opportunity to improve the quality of life among individuals, families and communities in the state of Arizona.

Despite recent decreases, violent crime remains a serious problem in Arizona. Addressing this problem requires a solution that integrates government, business and community resources in a comprehensive effort. Any discussion of the causes of violence immediately demonstrates the complexities of the problems of violent crime. Nonetheless, the following key elements can be identified:



Family



Community



Peers



School



Criminal Justice System

In order to reduce violent crime significantly, prevention programs must identify key processes in each of these elements and construct a multimodal solution that targets each of these areas simultaneously. Just as it is important that a solution be multimodal, it is also important that any solution be based on methodologically rigorous evaluations.

The scope of a comprehensive violent crime prevention effort demonstrates the need to integrate the efforts of various governmental agencies along with those of business leaders and community organizations. In Phoenix, the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI) has attempted to bring governmental, business and community leaders to the table to increase community awareness and to develop ideas to address the violence problem. These efforts are important because they create a catalyst for meaningful change and result in the implementation of multimodal violence prevention programs that are based on sound research.

Violent Crime Rates in Arizona

Figure 1: Comparison of Violent Crime Rates: 1975-2000

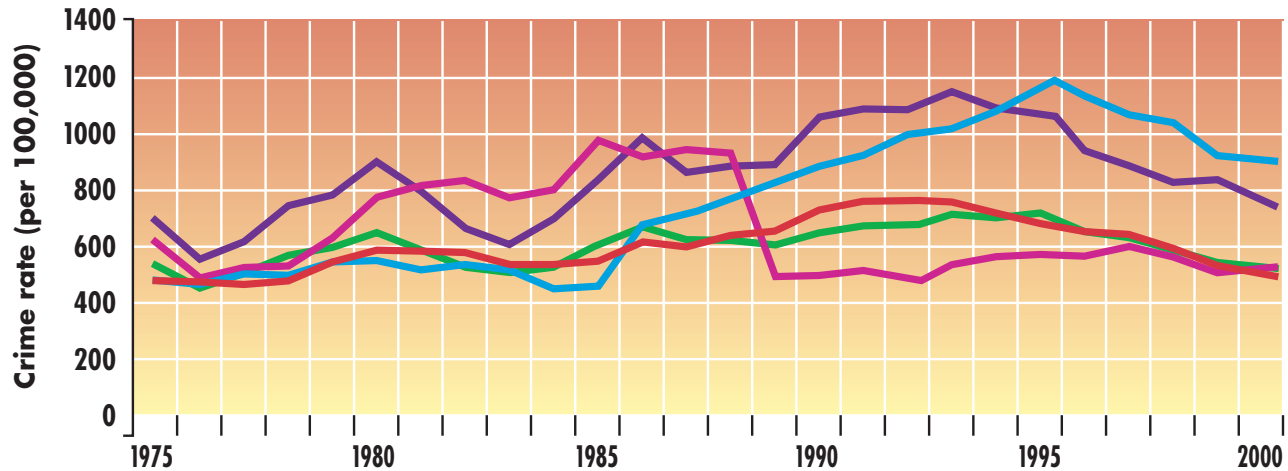
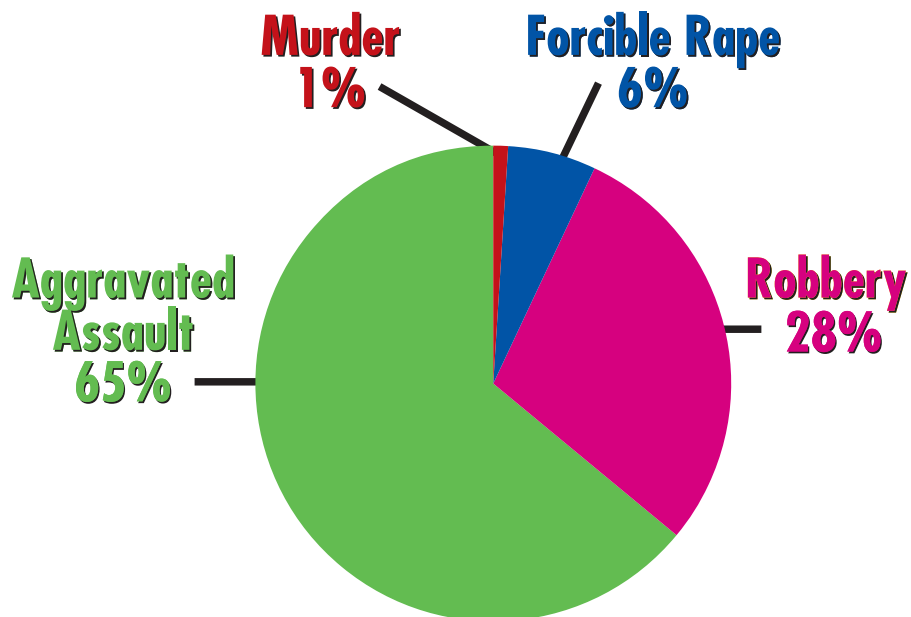


Figure 1 presents trends in violent crime rates (per 100,000 people) over the past 25 years, beginning in 1975 and continuing through 2000. It is based on Uniform Crime Report data collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in conjunction with the U.S. Census Bureau. The violent crime index is comprised of murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Figure 2 presents the distribution of violent crime across crime type.

Figure 2: Distribution of Violent Crimes in Arizona, 2000



Violence Prevention Resources

A number of government agencies and private organizations provide, via the Internet, information on effective violence prevention practices. The following are some examples:

National Resources

National Institute of Justice — <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/>

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention — <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/>

Violence Against Women Office — <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/>

Office of Justice Programs — American Indian and Alaskan Native Affairs Office
http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/americannative/whats_new.htm

Executive Office for Weed and Seed — <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/eows/>

U.S. Department of Education — Safe and Drug Free Schools Program -
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/programs.html>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Center for Substance Abuse
Prevention (CSAP) Model Programs — <http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov/>

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence — <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/>

State Resources

Arizona Prevention Resource Center (APRC) — <http://www.azprevention.org>

Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC) — <http://www.acjc.state.az.us>

Governor's Community Policy Office — <http://www.governor.state.az.us/cfpo/cfpo.cfm>

For further information contact:

Gaylene Armstrong, Ph.D. or Todd Armstrong, Ph.D.

Administration of Justice Department, Arizona State University West

P.O. Box 37100, Phoenix, AZ 85069

Gaylene.Armstrong@ASU.edu

Todd.Armstrong@ASU.edu

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